

## SUMMER FOOD SAFETY: OUTDOOR GRILLING

Grilling is an easy low-fat cooking method enjoyed by many. Although the art of grilling comes with practice, these pointers will help you to enjoy a successful and safe experience.

### **Bring Out the Barbecue**

Grills need annual cleaning after winter storage by scouring the grate with a wire brush. Spray the grid with oven cleaner and rinse thoroughly. Before each use, apply non-stick cooking spray to prevent food from sticking to the grill.

### **Stock Up on Charcoal**

Quality charcoal briquettes light quickly and have a long burn life. Keep charcoal in a cool, dry area. For instant-lighting charcoal, keep the bag tightly closed to prevent lighter fluid from evaporating.

### **Use Proper Tools**

Tongs and a spatula help to turn food without piercing it to lose any juices. A vegetable grilling basket holds smaller foods. Other useful utensils include a wire brush for cleaning, long-handled tongs and flame retardant mitts to protect hands.

### **Get Ready to Grill**

Arrange briquettes in a pyramid at the bottom of the grill. Add approximately two ounces of lighter fluid and carefully light with a match. Charcoal should be ready in about 20 minutes, with 70 percent covered with ash and displaying a slight red glow. To estimate the temperature, hold your hand, palm side down, about 6 inches above the coals.

- two seconds - it's hot, about 375 degrees F or more
- three seconds - it's medium-hot, about 350 to 375 degrees F
- four seconds - it's medium, about 300 to 350 degrees F
- five seconds - it's low, about 200 to 300 degrees F

When coals are ready for cooking, spread in a single layer or bank them. Set the grilling grid in place and put on the food.

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### **Food Safety**

Food safety should be a priority while grilling. If food is handled or cooked improperly, it may lead to food borne illness. It is very important to wash your hands thoroughly with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after food preparation.

- Keep meat cold until ready to grill. Do not leave it out at room temperature.
- Pre-cooked meats can still be grilled to add authentic flavor and shorten grilling time.
- If starting with frozen products, thaw in the refrigerator or microwave. Grill immediately after thawing in the microwave.
- Do not use the same platter or utensils to handle raw and cooked products.
- Use a meat thermometer to check internal temperatures. Ground meat should be 160 degrees F, poultry at 180 degrees F, poultry breasts at 170 degrees F, pork at 160 degrees F, and steaks at 145 degrees F.
- Once taken from the grill, keep the meat hot when serving in a warming tray or slow cooker.
- Place leftovers in the refrigerator and discard meats or other highly perishable items left out at room temperature for more than two hours.

### **Grilling Safety Tips**

- Pick a safe area - Position the grill in a well-ventilated, flat, level surface away from overhangs, deck railings and shrubbery. Keep children and pets away from the grill when in use.
- Handle charcoal carefully - Never add lighter fluid directly to hot coals since flames could travel up the fluid stream. Instead, place several new briquettes in a metal can and apply lighter fluid. Transfer the briquettes into the pyramid in the grill with pair of long-handled tongs and light with a match. Use proper utensils for safe handling of food and coals.
- Putting out the fire - Place the cover on the grill, close the vents and allow the coals to burn out completely. Let ashes cool for at least 48 hours, and dispose in a non-combustible container.

### **Additional Grilling Tips**

- Before placing food on grilling surface, preheat the grill and remove charred food debris.
- Avoid fire flare-ups by using lean meats and trimming away visible fat. Raise the rack to the highest position away from the heat and keep food on one side of the grill and coals or other heat source on the other side.
- Try grilling vegetables and fruits: eggplant, summer squashes, bell peppers, sweet onions, Roma or cherry tomatoes, mushrooms, mangoes, pineapple or peaches. Cut vegetables into half-inch slices or large chunks. Brush with warmed, seasoned oil. Turn only once, and grill until tender. Fruit should be halved with pits removed. Grill with the pulp side down.
- Cook fish in foil packets to retain natural flavors and protect it from smoke and fire.